Nothing 'Improper' Found In Intercepts, Boren Says

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Conversations that three House members, two senators, three congressional staff aides and a private citizen had with Nicaraguan government officials about aid to contra rebels in the mid-1980s were intercepted by U.S. intelligence services, Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.) disclosed yesterday.

Boren, chairman of the Senate intelligence committee considering the nomination of Robert M. Gates to head the CIA, told reporters after a closed hearing with Gates that there was nothing "improper, illegal or embarassing" about what the members were quoted as saying in the intelligence reports.

The panel's review of the intercepts, prompted by testimony from former CIA official Alan D. Fiers two weeks ago, found that neither Gates nor the intelligence agencies did anything improper, Boren added.

The review showed that the State Department, CIA and Pentagon submitted a total of 11 requests to the eavesdropping National Security Agency for reports about specific individuals—seven requests from the State Department alone.

Boren said the review uncovered two questionable uses of the highly classified intelligence material. In one instance, a report was given to someone in the executive branch who had no need to know the information. In the other, CIA files contain indications that then-CIA Director William J. Casey was considering giving one of the intercept reports to someone in Congress, Boren said. It is not clear yet whether that occurred, he said.

During a televised talk show last July, syndicated columnist Robert Novak told former House speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.), "I know that Bonior [Rep. David E. Bonior (D-Mich.)] was practically a member of the Nicaraguan Sandinista government. I had transcripts of him sitting there with Sandinista leaders and knocking his own government down."

Asked about the incident yesterday, Novak said he was referring to "one State Department" cable that he used to write a May 1985 column about meetings that Bonior and Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) had with Nicaraguan officials in Managua. Novak attributed the column to cables that "surfaced on Capitol Hill where we obtained them."

He said yesterday he did not think the cable he used was the same as the intercepts now being investigated. But he added: "It was in the nature of a transcript. There were a lot of direct quotes back and forth."

In his earlier testimony, Fiers, who helped run the secret aid program to the contra rebels, said he told superiors about a relationship between the Sandinistas and a staff aide to then-Rep. Michael Barnes (D-Md.) that "was, to my mind, outrageous." His complaints, Fiers added, "probably caused" Casey to meet with Barnes about the issue. Barnes said he felt Casey had been trying to intimidate Congress.

Boren did not mention names, but said in one instance the CIA counterintelligence office asked the National Security Agency for information about an individual in one congressional office. The material in the conversation was innocent and nothing more was done, he said.

Boren said the committee's investigation will continue to assure that intelligence agencies have proper procedures to guard privacy rights. The House intelligence panel also is reviewing the intercepts.